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## “ UNDER WESTERN EYES ”\*

BY JOSEPH CONRAD

### CHAPTER VI

WE remained looking at each other for a time.

“Do you know who he is?”

Miss Haldin, coming forward, put this question to me in English.

I took her offered hand.

“Everybody knows. He is a revolutionary feminist, a great writer, if you like, and—how shall I say it?—the—the familiar guest of Madame de S——’s mystic revolutionary salon.”

Miss Haldin passed her hand over her forehead.

“You know he was with me for more than an hour before you came in. I was so glad mother was lying down. She has many nights without sleep, and then sometimes in the middle of the day she gets a rest of several hours. It is sheer exhaustion, but still I am thankful. . . . If it were not for these intervals.”

She looked at me and with that extraordinary penetration which used to disconcert me shook her head.

“No; she would not go mad.”

“My dear young lady,” I cried, by way of protest, the more shocked because in my heart I was far from thinking Mrs. Haldin quite sane.

“You don’t know what a fine, clear intellect mother had,” continued Natalia Haldin, with her calm, clear-eyed simplicity which seemed to me always to have a quality of heroism.

“I am sure . . .” I murmured.

“I darkened mother’s room and came out here. I’ve wanted for so long to think quietly.”

She paused, then without giving any sign of distress, added, “It’s so difficult,” and looked at me with a strange fixity, as if watching for a sign of dissent or surprise.

I gave neither. I was irresistibly impelled to say:

“The visit from that gentleman has not made it any easier, I fear.”

Miss Haldin stood before me with a peculiar expression in her eyes.

“I don’t pretend to understand Peter Ivanovitch completely. Some guide one must have even if one does not wholly give up the direction of one’s conduct to him. I am an inexperienced girl, but I am not slavish. There has been too much of that in having one’s thoughts directed. But I don’t mind confessing to you that I have not been completely candid with Peter Ivanovitch. I don’t quite know what prevented me at the moment. . . .”

She walked away suddenly from me to a distant part of the room, but it was only to open and shut a drawer in a bureau. She approached me again with a piece of paper in her hand. It was thin and blackened with close handwriting. It was obviously a letter.

“I wanted to read you the very words,” she said. “This is one of my poor brother’s letters. He never doubted. How could he doubt? They are only such a small handful, these miserable oppressors before the unanimous will of our people.”

“Your brother believed in the power of a people’s will to achieve anything?”

“It was his religion,” declared Miss Haldin.

I looked at her calm face and her animated eyes.

“Of course the will must be awakened, inspired, concentrated. That is the true task of real agitators. One has got to give up one’s life to it. The degradation of servitude, the absolutist lies must be uprooted and swept out. Reform is impossible. There is nothing to reform. There is no legality, there are no institutions. There are only arbitrary decrees. There is only a handful of cruel—perhaps blind officials—against a nation.”

The letter rustled slightly in her hand. I glanced down at the thin, flimsy, blackened pages whose very handwriting seemed cabalistic, incomprehensible to the experience of western Europe.

“Stated like this,” I confessed, “the problem seems simple enough. But I fear I shall not see it solved. And if you go back to Russia I know that I shall not see you again. Yet once more I say, go back! Don’t suppose that I am thinking of your preservation. No. I know that you will not be returning to personal safety. But I had much rather think of you in danger there than see you exposed to what may be met here.”

“I tell you what,” said Miss Haldin, after a moment of reflection. “I believe that you hate revolution; you fancy it’s not quite honest. You belong to a people which has made a bargain with Fate and wouldn’t like to be rude to it. But we have made no bargain. It was never offered to us—so much liberty for so much hard cash. You shrink from the idea of revolutionary action for those you think well of as if it were something—how shall I say it?—not quite decent.”

I bowed my head.

“You are quite right,” I said. “I think very highly of you.”

“Don’t suppose I do not know it,” she began, hurriedly. “Your friendship has been very valuable.”

“I have done very little else but look on.”

She was a little flushed under the eyes.

“There is a way of looking on which is valuable. I have felt less lonely because of it. It’s difficult to explain.”

“Really? Well, I too have felt less lonely. That’s easy to explain, though. But it won’t go on much longer. The last thing I want to tell you is this: in a real revolution not a simple dynastic change or a mere reform of institutions—in a real revolution the best characters do not come to the front. A violent revolution falls into the hands of narrow-minded fanatics and of tyrannical hypocrites at first. Afterward comes the turn of all the pretentious intellectual failures of the time. Such are the chiefs and the leaders. You will notice that I have left out the mere rogues. The scrupulous and the just, the noble, humane and devoted natures; the unselfish

and the intelligent may begin a movement—but it passes away from them. They are not the leaders of a revolution. They are its victims—the victims of disgust, of disenchantment—often of remorse. Hopes grotesquely betrayed, ideals caricatured—that is the definition of revolutionary success. There have been in every revolution hearts broken by such successes. But enough of that. My meaning is that I don't want you to be a victim."

"If I could believe all you have said I still wouldn't think of myself," protested Miss Haldin. "I would take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would snatch at a piece of bread. The true progress must begin after. And for that the right men shall be found. They are already amongst us. One comes upon them in their obscurity, unknown, preparing themselves . . ."

She spread out the letter she had kept in her hand all the time and looking down at it:

"Yes; one comes upon such men," she repeated, and then read out the words, "'Unstained, lofty and solitary existences.'"

Folding up the letter while I looked at her interrogatively, she explained:

"These are the words which my brother applies to a young man he came to know in St. Petersburg. An intimate friend, I suppose. It must be. His is the only name my brother mentions in all his correspondence with me. Absolutely the only one, and—would you believe it?—the man is here. He arrived recently in Geneva."

"Have you seen him?" I inquired. "But, of course, you must have seen him."

"No, no; I haven't. I didn't know he was here. It's Peter Ivanovitch himself who told me. You have heard him yourself mentioning a new arrival from Petersburg. . . . Well, that is the man of 'unstained, lofty and solitary existence.' My brother's friend."

"Compromised politically, I suppose," I remarked.

"I don't know. Yes; it must be so. Who knows? Perhaps it was this very friendship with my brother which . . . But no. It is scarcely possible. Really, I know nothing except what Peter Ivanovitch told me of him. He has brought a letter of introduction from Father Zosim—you know, the priest democrat. You have heard of Father Zosim?"

"Oh yes. The famous Father Zosim had been staying here in Geneva for some two months about a year ago," I said. "When he left here he seems to have disappeared from the world."

"It appears that he is at work in Russia again. Somewhere in the centre," Miss Haldin said, with animation. "But please don't mention that to any one—don't let it slip from you, because if it got into the papers it would be dangerous for him."

"You are anxious, of course, to meet that friend of your brother?"

Miss Haldin put the letter into her pocket. Her eyes looked beyond my shoulder at the door of her mother's room.

"Not here," she murmured. "Not for the first time, at least."

After a moment of silence I said good-by, but Miss Haldin followed me into the anteroom, closing the door behind us carefully.

"I suppose you guess where I mean to go to-morrow?"

"You have made up your mind to call on Madame de S——."

"Yes; I am going to the Château Borel. I must."

"What do you expect to hear there?" I asked in a low voice.

I wondered if she were not deluding herself with some impossible hope. It was not that, however.

“Only think—such a friend. The only man mentioned in his letters. He would have something to give me, if nothing more than a few poor words. It may be something said and thought in these last days. Would you want me to turn my back on what is left of my poor brother? A friend?”

“Certainly not,” I said. “I quite understand your pious curiosity.”

“(Unstained, lofty and solitary existences),” she murmured to herself. “There are. There are. Well, let me question one of them about the loved dead.”

“How do you know, though, that you will meet him there? Is he staying in the château as a guest—do you suppose?”

“I can’t really tell,” she confessed. “He brought a written introduction from Father Zosim—who, it seems, is a friend of Madame de S—, too. She can’t be such a worthless woman, after all.”

“There were all sorts of rumors afloat about Father Zosim himself,” I observed.

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Calumny is a weapon of our government, too. It’s well known. Oh yes. It is a fact that Father Zosim had the protection of the Governor-General of a certain province. We talked on the subject with my brother two years ago, I remember. But his work was good. And now he is proscribed. What better proof can one require? But no matter what that priest was or is. All that cannot affect my brother’s friend. If I don’t meet him there I shall ask these people for his address. And, of course, mother must see him, too, later on. There is no guessing what he may have to tell us. It would be a mercy if mamma could be soothed. You know what she imagines. Some explanation perhaps may be found or—or even made up, perhaps. It would be no sin.”

“Certainly,” I said. “It would be no sin. It may be a mistake, though.”

“I want her only to recover some of her old spirit. While she is like this I cannot think of anything calmly.”

“Do you mean to invent some sort of pious fraud for your mother’s sake?” I asked.

“Why fraud? Such a friend is sure to know something of my brother in these last days. He could tell us. . . . There is something in the facts which will not let me rest. I am certain he meant to join us abroad—that he had some plans—some great patriotic action in view; not only for himself, but for both of us. I trusted in that. I looked forward to the time. Oh, with such hope and impatience. . . . I could have helped. And now suddenly this appearance of recklessness—as if he had not cared. . . .”

She remained silent for a time, then obstinately she concluded:

“I want to know. . . .”

Thinking it over, later on, while I walked slowly away from the Boulevard des Philosophes, I asked myself, critically, what precisely was it that she wanted to know? What I knew of her history was enough to give me a clew. In the educational establishment for girls where Miss Haldin finished her studies she was looked upon rather unfavorably. She was suspected of holding independent views on matters settled by official teaching. Afterward, when the two ladies returned to their country place, both

mother and daughter, by speaking their minds openly on local events, had earned for themselves a reputation of liberalism. The three-horse trap of the district police captain began to be seen frequently in the village. "I must keep an eye on the peasants"—so he explained his visits up at the house. "Two lonely ladies must be looked after a little." He would inspect the walls as though he wanted to pierce them with his eyes, peer at the photographs, turn over the books in the drawing-room negligently, and, after the usual refreshments, would depart. But the old priest of the village came one evening in the greatest distress and agitation to confess that he—the priest—had been ordered to watch and ascertain in other ways, too (such as using his spiritual power with the servants), all that was going on in the house, and especially in respect of the visitors these ladies received, who they were, the length of their stay, whether any of them were strangers to that part of the country, and so on. The poor, simple, old man was in an agony of humiliation and terror. "I came to warn you. Be cautious in your conduct, for the love of God. I am burning with shame, but there is no getting out from under the net. I shall have to tell them what I see, because if I did not there is my deacon. He would make the worst of things to curry favor. And then my son-in-law, the husband of my Parasha, who is a writer in the Government Domain office, they would soon kick him out—and maybe send him away somewhere." The old man lamented the necessities of the times—"when people do not agree somehow," and wiped his eyes. He did not wish to spend the evening of his days with a shaven head in the penitent's cell of some monastery—"and subjected to all the severities of ecclesiastical discipline; for they would show no mercy to an old man," he groaned. He became almost hysterical, and the two ladies, full of commiseration, soothed him the best they could before they let him go back to his cottage. But, as a matter of fact, they had very few visitors. The neighbors—some of them old friends—began to keep away; a few from timidity, others with marked disdain, being grand people that came only for the summer. Miss Haldin explained to me, aristocrats, reactionaries. It was a solitary existence for a young girl. Her relations with her mother were of the tenderest and most open kind; but Mrs. Haldin had seen the experiences of her own generation, its sufferings, its deceptions, its apostacies, too. Her affection for her children was expressed by the suppression of all signs of anxiety. She maintained a heroic reserve. To Natalia Haldin her brother, with his Petersburg existence, not enigmatical in the least (there could be no doubt of what he felt or thought), but conducted a little mysteriously, was the only visible representative of a proscribed liberty. All the significance of freedom, its indefinite promises, lived in their long discussions, breathing the loftiest hope of action and faith in success. Then suddenly the action, the hopes, came to an end, with the details ferreted out by the English journalist. The concrete fact, the fact of his death remained; but it remained obscure in its deeper causes. She felt herself abandoned without explanation. But she did not suspect him. What she wanted was to learn almost at any cost how she could remain faithful to his departed spirit.

## CHAPTER VII

SEVERAL days elapsed before I met Natalia Haldin again. I was crossing the place in front of the theatre when I made out her shapely figure

in the very act of turning between the gate pillars of the unattractive public promenade of the Bastions. She walked away from me, but I knew we should meet as she returned down the main alley—unless indeed she were going home. In that case I don't think I should have called on her yet. My desire to keep her away from these people was as strong as ever, but I had no illusions as to my power. I was but a Westerner, and it was clear that Miss Haldin would not, could not listen to my wisdom; and as to my desire of listening to her voice, it were better, I thought, not to indulge overmuch in that pleasure. No, I would not have gone to the Boulevard des Philosophes; but when at about the middle of the principal alley I saw Miss Haldin coming toward me, I felt I was too curious and too honest, perhaps, to run away.

There was something of the spring harshness in the air. The blue sky was hard, but the young leaves clung like soft mist about the uninteresting range of trees; and the clear sun put little points of gold into the gray of Miss Haldin's frank eyes, turned to me with a friendly greeting.

I inquired after the health of her mother.

She made a slight movement of the shoulders and a little sigh.

“But, you see, I did come out for a walk . . . for exercise, as you English say.”

I smiled approvingly, and she added an unexpected remark:

“It is a glorious day.”

Her voice, slightly harsh, but fascinating with its masculine and bird-like quality, had the accent of spontaneous conviction. I was glad of it. It was as though she had become aware of her youth—for there was nothing of spring-like glory in the rectangular railed space of grass and trees framed visibly by the orderly roof slopes of that town, comely without grace and hospitable without sympathy. In the very air through which she moved there was but little warmth; and the sky, the sky of a land without horizons, swept and washed clean by the April showers, extended a cold, cruel blue without elevation, narrowed suddenly by the ugly dark wall of the Jura where, here and there, lingered yet a few miserable trails and patches of snow. All the glory of the season must have been within herself—and I was glad this feeling had come into her life if only for a little time.

“I am pleased to hear you say these words.”

She gave me a quick look. Quick, not stealthy. If there was one thing of which she was absolutely incapable it was stealthiness of appearance or intention. Her sincerity was expressed in the very rhythm of her walk as she moved by my side. It was I who was looking at her covertly—if I may say so. I knew where she had been, but I did not know what she had seen and heard in that nest of aristocratic conspiracies. I use the word aristocratic for want of a better term. The Château Borel embowered in the trees and thickets of its neglected grounds (they looked so through the spaces of iron railings interrupting the continuity of the enclosing wall), the Château Borel was in our day like the residence of that other dangerous and exiled woman, Madame de Staël, in the Napoleonic era. Only the Napoleonic despotism, the booted and spurred heir of the Revolution, which counted that intellectual woman for an enemy worthy to be watched, was something quite unlike the autocracy in mystic vestments engendered by the slavery of a Tartar conquest. And Madame de S— was very far from resembling the gifted author of “Corinne.” She

made a great noise about being persecuted. I don't know if she were regarded in certain circles as dangerous. As to being watched, I imagine that the Château Borel could be subjected only to a most distant observation. It was in its exclusiveness an ideal abode for hatching superior plots—whether serious or futile. But all this did not interest me. I wanted to know the effect its extraordinary inhabitants and its special atmosphere had produced on a girl like Miss Haldin, so true, so honest, but so dangerously inexperienced. Her unconsciously lofty ignorance of the baser instincts of mankind left her disarmed before her own impulses. And there was also that friend of her brother, the significant new arrival from Russia. . . . I wondered whether she had attained her end in meeting him.

We walked for some time, slowly and in silence.

"You know," I attacked her suddenly, "if you don't intend telling me anything you must say so distinctly, and then, of course, it will be final. But I won't play at delicacy. I ask you point-blank for all the details."

She smiled faintly at my threatening tone.

"You are as curious as a child."

"No; I am only an anxious old man," I replied, earnestly.

She rested her glance on me as if to ascertain the degree of my anxiety or the number of my years. My physiognomy has never been expressive, I believe; and as to my years, I am not ancient enough as yet to be strikingly decrepit. I have no long beard like the good hermit of a romantic ballad. My footsteps are not tottering, my aspect not that of a slow, venerable sage. Those picturesque advantages are not mine. I am old, alas! in a brisk, commonplace way. And it seemed to me as though there were some pity for me in Miss Haldin's prolonged glance. She stepped out a little quicker.

"You ask for all the details. Let me see. I ought to remember them. It was novel enough for a—a village girl like me."

After a moment of silence she remarked that the Château Borel was almost as neglected inside as outside. It was nothing to wonder at. A Hamburg banker, I believe retired from business, had it built to cheer his remaining days by the view of that lake whose precise, orderly and well-to-do beauty must have been attractive to the unromantic imagination of a banker. But he died soon. His wife departed, too, but only to Italy, and this house of moneyed ease, presumably unsaleable, had stood empty for several years. One went up to it along a gravel drive round a large, coarse grass plot with plenty of time to observe the degradation of its stuccoed front. Miss Haldin said that the impression was unpleasant.

She observed green stains of moss on the steps of the terrace. The front door stood wide open. There was no one about. She found herself in a wide, lofty and absolutely empty hall with a good many doors. These doors were all shut. A broad stone staircase faced her. The effect of the whole was of an untenanted house. She stood still, disconcerted by the solitude, but after a while she became aware of a voice speaking continuously somewhere.

"You were probably being observed all the time," I suggested. "There must have been eyes."

"I don't see how that could be," she retorted. "I haven't seen even a bird in the grounds. I don't remember hearing a single twitter in the trees. The whole place appeared utterly deserted except for the voice."



She could not make out the language—Russian, French or German. No one seemed to answer it. It was as though the voice had been left behind by the departed inhabitants to talk to the bare walls. It went on volubly with a pause now and then. It was lonely and sad. The time seemed very long to Miss Haldin. An invisible repugnance prevented her from opening one of the doors in the hall. It was so hopeless. No one would come, the voice would never stop. She confessed to me that she had to resist an impulse to turn round and go away unseen, as she had come.

“ Really? You had that impulse?” I cried, full of regret. “ What a pity you did not obey it.”

She shook her head.

“ What a strange memory it would have been for one. Those deserted grounds, that empty hall, that impersonal, voluble voice and—nobody, nothing, not a soul.”

The memory would have been unique and harmless. But she was not a girl to run away from an intimidating impression of solitude and mystery. “ No, I did not run away,” she said; “ I stayed where I was—and I did meet a soul. Such a strange soul.”

As she was gazing up the broad staircase and had concluded that the voice came from somewhere above, a rustle of dress and light footsteps attracted her attention. She looked down and saw a woman crossing the hall, having issued apparently through one of the many doors. Her face was averted, so that at first she was not aware of Miss Haldin.

On turning her head and seeing a stranger, she appeared very much startled. From her slender figure Miss Haldin had taken her for a young girl; but if her face was almost childishly round, it was also sallow and wrinkled with dark rings under the eyes. A thick crop of dusty brown hair was parted boyishly on the side with a lateral wave above the dry, furrowed forehead. After a moment of dumb blinking she suddenly squatted down on the floor.

“ What do you mean—squatted down?” I asked, astonished. “ This is a very strange detail.”

Miss Haldin explained the reason. This person when first seen was carrying a small bowl in her hand. She had squatted to set it down on the floor for the benefit of a large cat, which appeared then suddenly from behind her skirts and put its head into the bowl greedily. She got up and, approaching Miss Haldin, asked, with nervous bluntness:

“ What do you want? Who are you?”

Miss Haldin mentioned her name and also the name of Peter Ivanovitch. The girlish, elderly woman nodded and puckered her face into a momentary expression of sympathy. Her black silk blouse was old and even frayed in places; the black serge skirt was short and shabby. She continued to blink at close quarters and her eyelashes and eyebrows seemed worn out, too. Miss Haldin, speaking gently to her, as if to an unhappy and sensitive person, explained how it was that her visit could not be an altogether unexpected event to Madame de S—.

“ Ah! Peter Ivanovitch brought you an invitation. How was I to know? A *dame de compagnie* is not consulted, as you may imagine.”

The shabby woman laughed a little. Her teeth, splendidly white and admirably even, looked absurdly out of place, like a string of pearls on the

neck of a ragged tramp. "Peter Ivanovitch is the greatest genius of the century, perhaps, but he is the most inconsiderate man living. So if you have an appointment with him you must not be surprised to hear that he is not here."

Miss Haldin protested that she had no appointment with Peter Ivanovitch. She became interested at once in that bizarre person and that last made her grimace of significant silence and started off again.

"Why should he put himself out for you or any one else? Oh, these geniuses! If you only knew! Yes! And their books—I mean, of course, the books that the world admires, the inspired books. But you have not been behind the scenes. Wait till you have to sit at a table for half a day with a pen in your hand. He can walk up and down his rooms for hours and hours. I used to get so stiff and numb as I sat that I was afraid I would lose my balance and fall off the chair all at once."

She kept her hands folded in front of her, and her eyes, fixed on Miss Haldin's face, betrayed no animation whatever. Their expression was that of quiet conviction. Miss Haldin, gathering that the lady who called herself a *dame de compagnie* was proud of having acted as secretary to Peter Ivanovitch, made an amiable remark.

"You could not imagine a more trying experience," protested the lady. "There is an Anglo-American journalist with Madame de S—— now or I would take you up," she continued in a changed tone and glancing towards the staircase. "I act as master of ceremonies."

It appeared that Madame de S—— could not bear Swiss servants about her person; and, indeed, servants would not stay for very long in the Château Borel. There were always difficulties. Miss Haldin had already noticed that the hall was like a dusty barn of marble and stucco with cobwebs in the corners and faint tracks of mud on the black and white tessellated floor.

"I look also after this animal," continued the *dame de compagnie*, keeping her hands folded quietly in front of her; and she bent her worn gaze upon the cat. "I don't mind a bit. Animals have their rights; though, strictly speaking, I see no reason why they should not suffer as well as human beings. Do you? But, of course, they never suffer so much. That is impossible. Only in their case it is more pitiful because they cannot make a revolution. I used to be a Republican. I suppose you are a Republican?"

Miss Haldin confessed to me that she did not know what to say. But she nodded slightly and asked in her turn:

"And are you no longer a Republican?"

"After taking down Peter Ivanovitch from dictation for two years it is difficult for me to be anything. First of all, you have to sit perfectly motionless. The slightest movement you make puts to flight the ideas of Peter Ivanovitch. You hardly dare to breathe. And as to coughing—God forbid! Peter Ivanovitch changed the position of the table to the wall, because at first I could not help raising my eyes to look out of the window while waiting for him to go on with his dictation. That was not allowed. He said I stared so stupidly. I was likewise not permitted to look at him over my shoulder. Instantly Peter Ivanovitch stamped his foot and would roar, 'Look down on the paper!' It seems my expression, my face, put him off. Well, I know that I am not beautiful and that my expression

is not hopeful, either. He said that my air of unintelligent expectation irritated him. These are his own words.”

Miss Haldin was shocked, but she confessed to me that she was not altogether surprised.

“Is it possible that Peter Ivanovitch could treat any woman so rudely?” she asked.

The *dame de compagnie* nodded several times with her air of discretion, then assured Miss Haldin that she did not mind in the least. The trying part of it was to have the secret of the composition laid bare before her; to see the great author of the revolutionary gospels grope for words as if he were in the dark as to what he meant to say.

“I am quite willing to be the blind instrument of higher ends. To give one’s life for the cause is nothing. But to have one’s illusions destroyed—that is really almost more than one can bear. I really don’t exaggerate,” she insisted. “It seemed to freeze my very beliefs in me—the more so that when we worked in winter Peter Ivanovitch, walking up and down the room, required no artificial heat to keep himself warm. Even in the south of France there are bitterly cold days, especially when you have to sit still for six hours at a stretch. The walls of these villas are so flimsy. Peter Ivanovitch did not seem to be aware of anything. It is true that I kept down my shivers from fear of putting him out. I used to set my teeth till my jaw felt absolutely locked. In the moments when Peter Ivanovitch interrupted his dictation, and sometimes these intervals were very long—often twenty minutes, no less, while he walked to and fro behind my back muttering to himself—I felt I was dying by inches, I assure you. Perhaps if I had let my teeth rattle Peter Ivanovitch might have noticed my distress, but I don’t think it would have had any practical effect. He’s very miserly in such matters.”

The *dame de compagnie* glanced up the staircase. The big cat had finished the milk and was rubbing its whiskered cheek sinuously against her skirt. She dived suddenly to snatch it up from the floor.

“Miserliness is rather a quality than otherwise, you know,” she continued, holding the cat in her folded arms. “With us it is misers who can spare money for worthy objects—not the so-called generous natures. But pray don’t think I am a sybarite. My father was a clerk in the Ministry of Finances with no position at all. You may guess by this that our home was far from luxurious, though of course we did not actually suffer from cold. I ran away from my parents, you know; but that could not happen till it so chanced that I began to think by myself. It is not very easy, such thinking. One has got to be put in the way of it, awakened to the truth. I am indebted for my salvation to an old apple-woman who had her stall under the gateway of the house we lived in. She had a kind, wrinkled face and the most friendly voice imaginable. One day casually we began to talk about a child, a ragged little girl we had seen begging from men in the streets at dusk; and from one thing to another my eyes began to open gradually to the horrors from which innocent people are made to suffer in this world, only in order that governments might exist. After I once understood the crime of the upper classes I could not go on living with my parents. Not a single charitable word was to be heard in our home from year’s end to year’s end; there was nothing but the talk of vile office intrigues, and of promotion and

of salaries, and of courting the favor of the chiefs. The mere idea of marrying one day such another man as my father made me shudder. I don't mean to let you think there was any one wanting to marry me. There was not the slightest prospect of anything of the kind. But was it not a sin enough to live on a government salary while half Prussia was dying of hunger? The Ministry of Finances! What a grotesque horror it is! What does the starving, ignorant people want with a Ministry of Finances! I kissed my old folks on both cheeks and went away from them to live in cellars with the proletariat. I tried to make myself useful to the utterly hopeless. I suppose you understand what I mean? I mean the people who have nowhere to go and nothing to look forward to in this life. Do you understand how frightful that is—nothing to look forward to! Sometimes I think that it is only in Russia that there are such people and such a depth of misery can be reached. Well, I plunged into it and—do you know—there isn't much that one can do in there. No indeed—at least, as long as there are Ministries of Finances and such like grotesque horrors to stand in the way. I suppose I would have gone mad there just trying to fight the vermin if it had not been for a man. It was my old friend and teacher, the poor, saintly apple-woman, who discovered him for me quite accidentally. She came to fetch me late one evening in her quiet way. I followed her where she would lead; that part of my life was in her hands altogether and without her my spirit would have perished miserably. The man was a young workman, a lithographer by trade, and he had got into trouble in connection with that affair of temperance tracts—you remember. There was a lot of people put in prison for that. The Ministry of Finances again! What would become of it if the poor folk ceased making beasts of themselves with drink? Upon my word, I would think that finances and all the rest of it are an invention of the devil—if I believed in a personal devil. Only the belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness. Finances indeed!"

Hatred and contempt hissed in her utterance of the word "finances," but at the very moment she gently stroked the cat reposing in her arms. She even raised them slightly, and inclining her head rubbed her cheek against the fur of the animal, which received this caress with that complete detachment so characteristic of its kind. Then looking at Miss Haldin, she excused herself once more for not taking her up-stairs to Madame S—. The interview could not be interrupted. Presently the journalist would be seen coming down the stairs. The best thing was to remain in the hall; and, besides, all these rooms (she glanced all round at the many doors), all these rooms on the ground floor were unfurnished.

"Positively there is no chair down here to offer you," she continued. "But if you prefer your own thoughts to my chatter, I will sit down on the bottom step here and keep silent."

Miss Haldin hastened to protest. On the contrary, she was very much interested in the story of the journeyman lithographer. He was a revolutionist, of course.

"A martyr, a simple man," said the *dame de compagnie*, with a faint sigh and gazing through the open front door dreamily. She turned her misty brown eyes on Miss Haldin.

"I lived with him for four months. It was like a nightmare."

As Miss Haldin looked at her steadily she began to describe the emaciated face of the man, his fleshless limbs, his destitution. The room into which the apple-woman had led her was a tiny garret, a miserable den under the roof of a sordid house. The plaster fallen off the walls covered the floor, and when the door was opened a horrible tapestry of black cobwebs waved in the draught. He had been liberated a few days before—flung out of prison into the streets. And Miss Haldin seemed to see, for the first time, a name and a face upon the body of that suffering people whose hard fate had been the subject of so many conversations between her and her brother in the garden of their country house.

He had been arrested with scores and scores of other people in that affair of the lithographed temperance tracts. Unluckily, having got hold of a great many suspected persons, the police thought they could extract from some of them other information relating to the revolutionist propaganda.

“ They beat him so cruelly in the course of the investigation,” went on the *dame de compagnie*, “ that they injured him internally. When they had done with him he was doomed. He could do nothing for himself. I beheld him lying on a wooden bedstead without any bedding, with his head on a bundle of dirty rags, lent to him out of charity by an old rag-picker who happened to live in the basement of the house. There he was, uncovered, burning with fever, and there was not even a jug in the room for the water to quench his thirst with. There was nothing whatever—just that bedstead and the bare floor.”

“ Was there no one in all that great town amongst the liberals and revolutionaries to extend a helping hand to a brother?” asked Miss Haldin, indignantly.

“ Yes; but you do not know the most terrible part of that man’s misery. Listen. It seems that they ill-used him so atrociously that at last his firmness gave way and he did let out some information. Poor soul! the flesh is weak, you know. What it was he did not tell me. There was a crushed spirit in that mangled body. Nothing I found to say could make him whole. When they let him out he crept into that hole and bore his remorse stoically. He would not go near any one he knew. I would have sought assistance for him, but indeed where could I have gone looking for it? Where was I to look for any one who had anything to spare or any power to help. The people living round us were all starving and drunken. They were the victims of the Ministry of Finances. Don’t ask me how we lived. I couldn’t tell you. It was like a miracle of wretchedness. I had nothing to sell, and, I assure you, my clothes were in such a state that it was impossible for me to go out in the daytime. I was indecent. I had to wait till it was dark before I ventured into the streets to beg for a crust of bread or whatever I could get to keep him and me alive. Often I got nothing, and then I would crawl back and lie on the floor by the side of his couch. Oh yes; I can sleep quite soundly on bare boards. That is nothing, and I am only mentioning it to you so that you should not think I am a sybarite. It was infinitely less killing than the task of sitting for hours at a table in a cold study to take the books of Peter Ivanovitch from dictation. But you shall see yourself what that is like, so I needn’t say any more about it.”

"It is by no means certain that I will ever take Peter Ivanovitch from dictation," Miss Haldin protested.

"No!" said the other, incredulously. "Not certain? You mean to say that you have not made up your mind?"

When Miss Haldin assured her that there never had been any question of that between her and Peter Ivanovitch the woman with the cat compressed her lips tightly for a moment.

"Oh, you will find yourself settled at the table before you know that you have made up your mind. Don't you make a mistake; it is disenchanted to hear Peter Ivanovitch dictate, but at the same time there is a fascination about it. He is a man of genius. Your face is certain not to irritate him; you may perhaps even help his inspiration, make it easier for him to deliver his message. As I look at you I feel certain that you are the kind of woman who is not likely to check the flow of his inspiration."

Miss Haldin thought it useless to protest against all these assumptions.

"But this man—this workman—did he die under your care?" she said, after a short silence.

The *dame de compagnie*, listening up the stairs where two voices were alternating with some animation, made no answer for a time. When the loud sounds of the discussion had sunk into an almost inaudible murmur, she turned to Miss Haldin:

"Yes, he died," she said, "but not, literally speaking, in my arms, as you might suppose. As a matter of fact, I was asleep when he breathed his last. So even now I cannot say I have seen anybody die. A few days before the end some young men had found us out in our extremity. They were revolutionists, as you might guess. He ought to have trusted in his political friends when he came out of prison. He had been liked and respected before and nobody would have dreamed of reproaching him with his indiscretion before the police. Everybody knows how they go to work and the strongest man has his moments of weakness before pain. Why, even hunger alone is enough to give one queer ideas as to what may be done. A doctor came. Our lot was alleviated as far as physical comforts go, but otherwise he could not be consoled—poor man. I assure you, Miss Haldin, that he was very lovable, but I had not the strength to weep. I was nearly dead myself. But there were kind hearts to take care of me. A decent dress was found to clothe my nakedness. I tell you, I was not decent—and after a time the revolutionists placed me with a Jewish family going abroad as governess. Of course I could teach the children; I finished the sixth class of the Lyceum. But the real object was that I should be useful to the cause. I had to carry some important papers across the frontier. I was intrusted with a packet which I carried next my breast. The gendarmes at the station did not suspect the governess of a Jewish family, busy looking after three children. I don't suppose those Hebrews knew what I had on me, for I had been introduced to them in a very roundabout way by persons who did not belong to the revolutionary movement, and naturally I had been instructed to accept a very small salary. When we reached Germany I left that family and delivered my papers to a revolutionist in Stuttgart; after that I was employed in various ways. But you do not want to hear of that. I have never felt that I was very useful, but I live in hopes of seeing all the

Ministries destroyed, finances and all. The greatest joy of my life has been to hear what your brother has done.”

She directed her round eyes again to the sunshine outside, while the cat reposing within her folded arms had an air of lordly beatitude and Sphinx-like meditation.

“Yes, I rejoiced,” she began again. “For me there is a heroic ring about the very name of Haldin. They must have been trembling with fear in their Ministries—all those men with fiendish hearts. Here I stand talking to you, and when I think of all the cruelties, oppressions and injustices that are going on at this very moment my head begins to swim. I have looked closely at what would seem inconceivable if one’s own eyes had not to be trusted. I have looked at things that made me hate myself for my helplessness. I hated my hands that had no power, my voice that could not be heard, my very mind that would not become unhinged. Ah, I have seen things. And you?”

Miss Haldin was moved. She shook her head slightly.

“No, I have seen nothing for myself as yet,” she murmured. “We have always lived in the country. It was my brother’s wish.”

“It is a curious meeting—this—between you and me,” continued the other. “Do you believe in chance, Miss Haldin? How could I have expected to see you, his sister, with my own eyes. Do you know that when the news came the revolutionaries here were as much surprised as pleased, every bit. No one seemed to know anything about your brother. Peter Ivanovitch himself had not foreseen that such a blow was going to be struck. I suppose your brother was simply inspired. I myself think that such deeds should be done by inspiration. It is a great privilege to have the inspiration and the opportunity. Did he resemble you at all? Don’t you rejoice, Miss Haldin?”

“You must not expect too much from me,” said Miss Haldin, repressing an inclination to cry, which came over her suddenly. She succeeded, then added, calmly, “I am not a heroic person.”

“You think you couldn’t have done such a thing yourself, perhaps?”

“I don’t know. I must not even ask myself till I have lived a little longer, seen more. . . .”

The other moved her head appreciatively. The purring of the cat had a loud complacency in the empty hall. No sound of voices came from up-stairs. Miss Haldin broke the silence.

“What is it precisely that you heard people say about my brother? You said that they were surprised. Yes, I suppose they were. Did it not seem strange to them that my brother should have failed to save himself after the most difficult part—that is, getting away from the spot—was over? Conspirators should understand these things well. There are reasons why I am very anxious to know.”

The *dame de compagnie* had advanced to the open hall door. She glanced rapidly over her shoulder at Miss Haldin, who remained within the hall.

“Succeed to escape,” she repeated, absently. “Didn’t he make the sacrifice of his life? Wasn’t he just simply inspired? Wasn’t it an act of abnegation? Aren’t you certain?”

“What I am certain of,” said Miss Haldin, “is that it was not an act of despair. Have you not heard some opinion expressed here upon his miserable capture?”

The *dame de compagnie* mused for a while in the doorway.

"Did I hear? Of course everything is discussed here. Has not all the world been speaking about your brother? For my part, the mere mention of his achievement plunges me into an envious ecstasy. Why should a man certain of immortality think of his life at all?"

She kept her back turned to Miss Haldin. Up-stairs from behind a great dingy white and gold door, visible behind the balustrade of the first-floor landing, a deep voice began to drone formally, as if reading over notes or something of the sort. It paused frequently and then ceased altogether.

"I don't think I can stay any longer," said Miss Haldin. "I will return another day."

She waited for the *dame de compagnie* to make room for her exit, but that last did not move. She appeared lost in the contemplation of sunshine and shadows, sharing between themselves the stillness of the deserted grounds. She concealed the view of the drive from Miss Haldin. Suddenly she said:

"It is not necessary. Here is Peter Ivanovitch himself coming up. But he is not alone. He is seldom alone now."

Hearing that Peter Ivanovitch was approaching, Miss Haldin was not so pleased as she might have been expected to be. Somehow she had lost the desire to see either the heroic captive or Madame de S—, and the reason of that shrinking which came upon her at the very last minute is accounted for by the feeling that those two people had not been treating the woman with the cat kindly.

"Would you please let me pass?" said Miss Haldin at last, touching lightly the shoulder of the *dame de compagnie*.

But the other, pressing the cat to her breast, did not budge.

"I know who it is with him," she said, without even looking back. More unaccountably than ever, Miss Haldin felt a strong impulse to leave the house.

"Madame de S— may be engaged for some time yet, and what I have got to say to Peter Ivanovitch is just a simple question which I might put to him when I meet him in the grounds on my way down. I really think I will go. I have been some time here and I am anxious to get back to my mother. Will you let me pass, please?"

The *dame de compagnie* turned her head at last.

"I never supposed that you really wanted to see Madame de S—," she said, with unexpected insight. "Not for a moment." There was something confidential and mysterious in her tone. She passed through the door, with Miss Haldin following her, on to the terrace, and they descended, side by side, the moss-grown stone steps. There was no one to be seen on such stretches of the drive as were visible from the front of the house.

"They are hidden by the trees over there," explained Miss Haldin's new acquaintance, "but you shall see them directly. I don't know who that young man is to whom Peter Ivanovitch has taken such a fancy. He must be one of us or he would not be admitted here when the others come. You know who I mean by the others. But I must say that he is not at all mystically inclined. I don't know that I have made him out yet. Naturally, I am never for very long in the drawing-room. There



is always something to do for me, though the establishment here is not so extensive as the villa on the Riviera. But still, there are plenty of opportunities for me to make myself useful.”

To the left, passing by the ivy-grown end of the stables, appeared Peter Ivanovitch and his companion. They walked very slowly, conversing with some animation; and just then they even stopped for a moment, and Peter Ivanovitch was seen to gesticulate, discoursing while the young man listened motionless, with his arms hanging down and his head bowed a little. He was dressed in a dark gray suit and a black hat. The round eyes of the *dame de compagnie* remained fixed on the two figures which had resumed their leisurely approach.

“An extremely civil young man,” she said. “You will see what a bow he will make; and it won’t altogether be so exceptional, either. He bows in the same way when he meets me alone in the hall.”

She moved on a few steps with Miss Haldin by her side and things happened just as she had foretold. The young man took off his hat, bowed slightly and fell back, while Peter Ivanovitch advanced quicker, his black, thick arms extended heartily, and seized hold of both Miss Haldin’s hands, shook them and peered at her through his dark glasses, which gave him the impenetrable air of a masked man, a face without expression.

“That’s right, that’s right!” he exclaimed twice, approvingly. “And so you have been looked after by. . . .” He frowned slightly at the *dame de compagnie*, who was still nursing the cat. “I conclude Eleanor—Madame de S——, is engaged. I know she expected somebody to-day. So the newspaper man did turn up, eh? She is engaged?”

For all answer the *dame de compagnie* turned away her head.

“It is very unfortunate—very unfortunate, indeed. I very much regret that you should have been. . . .” He lowered suddenly his voice. “But what is it—surely you are not departing, Natalia Victorovna? You got bored waiting, didn’t you?”

“Not in the least,” Miss Haldin protested. “Only I have been here some time and I am anxious to get back to my mother.”

“The time seemed long, eh? I am afraid our worthy friend here” (Peter Ivanovitch suddenly jerked his head sideways towards his right shoulder and jerked it up again)—“our worthy friend here had not the art of shortening the moments of waiting. No, distinctly she has not the art; and in that respect good intentions alone count for nothing.”

The *dame de compagnie* dropped her arms and the cat found itself suddenly on the ground. It remained quite still after alighting, one hind leg stretched backward. Miss Haldin was extremely indignant on behalf of the lady companion.

“Believe me, Peter Ivanovitch, that the moments I have passed in the hall of this house have been not a little interesting and very instructive, too. They are memorable. I do not regret the waiting, but I see that the object of my call here can be attained without taking up Madame S——’s time.”

At this point I interrupted Miss Haldin. The above relation is founded on her narrative, which I have not so much dramatized as might be supposed. She had rendered with extraordinary feeling and animation the very accent almost of the disciple of the old apple-woman, the irreconcilable

hater of Ministries, the voluntary servant of the poor. Miss Haldin's true and delicate humanity was extremely shocked by the uncongenial fate of her new acquaintance, that lady companion, secretary, whatever she was. For my own part, I was pleased to discover in it one more obstacle to intimacy with Madame de S——; I had a positive abhorrence for the painted, bedizened, dead-faced, glassy-eyed Egeria of Peter Ivanovitch. I do not know what was her attitude to the unseen, but I know that in the affairs of this world she was avaricious, greedy and unscrupulous. It was within my knowledge that she had been worsted in a sordid and desperate quarrel about money matters with the family of her late husband, the diplomatist. Some very august personages indeed (whom in her fury she had insisted upon scandalously involving in her affairs) had incurred her animosity. I find it perfectly easy to believe that she had come to within an ace of being spirited away for reasons of state into some discreet *Maison de Sante*—a madhouse of sorts, to be plain. It appears, however, that certain high-placed personages opposed it for reasons which . . .

But it's no use to go into details.

Wonder may be expressed at a man in the position of a teacher of languages knowing all this with such definiteness. A novelist says this and that of her personages, and if only he knows how to say it earnestly enough he may not be questioned upon the inventions of his brain in which his own belief is made sufficiently manifest by a telling phrase, a poetic image, the accent of emotion. Art is great. But I have no art, and in this attempt at writing, if I am trying to tell a story, I do not aspire to achieve a novel. Not having invented Madame de S——, I feel bound to explain how I came to know so much about her.

My informant was the Russian wife of a friend of mine already mentioned, the professor of Lausanne University. It was from her that I learned the last fact of Madame de S——'s history with which I intend to trouble my readers. She told me, speaking positively, as a person who trusts her sources, of the cause of Madame de S——'s flight from Russia some years before. It was neither more nor less than this: that she became suspect to the police in connection with the assassination of the Emperor Alexander. The ground of this suspicion was either some unguarded expressions that escaped her in public or some talk overheard in her salon. Overheard, we must believe, by some guest, perhaps a friend, who hastened to play the informer, I suppose. At any rate, the overheard matter seemed to imply her foreknowledge of that event, and I think she was wise in not waiting for the investigation of such a charge. Some of my readers may remember a little book from her pen, published in Paris, a mystically bad-tempered, declamatory and frightfully disconnected piece of writing, in which she all but admits the foreknowledge, more than hints at its supernatural origin, and plainly suggests in venomous innuendoes that the guilt of the act was not with the terrorists, but with a palace intrigue. When I observed to my friend the professor's wife that the life of Madame de S——, with its unofficial diplomacy, its intrigues, lawsuits, favors, disgrace, expulsions, its atmosphere of scandal, occultism and charlatanism, was more fit for the eighteenth century than for the conditions of our own time she assented with a smile, but a moment after went on in a reflective tone: "Charlatanism?—yes, in a certain

measure. Still, the times are changed. There are forces now which were non-existent in the eighteenth century. I should not be surprised if she were more dangerous than an Englishman would be willing to believe. And, what's more, she is looked upon as really dangerous by certain people—*chez nous*.”

*Chez nous* in this connection meant Russia in general, and the Russian political police in particular. The object of my digression from the straight course of Miss Haldin's relation (in my own words) of her visit to the Château Borel was to bring forward that statement of my friend, the professor's wife. I wanted to bring it forward simply to make what I have to say presently of Mr. Razumov's presence in Geneva a little more credible—for this is a Russian story for Western ears, which, as I have observed already, are not attuned to certain tones of cynicism and cruelty of moral negation and even of moral distress already silenced at our end of Europe. And this I state as my excuse for having left Miss Haldin standing, one of the little group of two women and two men who had come together below the terrace of the Château Borel.

The knowledge which I have stated above was in my mind when, as I have said, I interrupted Miss Haldin. I interrupted her with the cry of profound satisfaction.

“ So you never saw Madame de S——, after all ? ”

Miss Haldin shook her head. It was very satisfactory to me. I am putting it very mildly when I say that this contact could give her no advantage. She had not seen Madame de S—— ! That was excellent, excellent ! I welcomed the conviction that she would never know Madame de S—— now. I could not explain the reason of the conviction, but by the knowledge that Miss Haldin was standing face to face with her brother's wonderful friend. I preferred him to Madame de S—— as the companion and guide of that young girl, abandoned to her inexperience by the miserable end of her brother. But, at any rate, that life now ended had been sincere, and perhaps its thought might have been lofty, its moral sufferings profound, its last act a true sacrifice. It is not for us, the staid lovers calmed by the possession of a conquered liberty, to condemn without appeal the fierceness of thwarted desire.

I am not ashamed of the warmth of my regard for Miss Haldin. It was, it must be admitted, an unselfish sentiment, being its own reward. The late Victor Haldin—in the light of that sentiment—appeared to me, not as a sinister conspirator, but as a pure enthusiast. I did not wish, indeed, to judge him, but the very fact that he did not escape, that fact which brought so much trouble to both his mother and his sister, spoke to me in his favor. Meantime, in my fear of seeing the girl surrender to the influence of the Château Borel revolutionary feminism, I was more than willing to put my trust in that friend of the late Victor Haldin. He was nothing but a name, you will say. Exactly. A name. And, what's more, the only name—the only name to be found in the correspondence between brother and sister; the only link with that mental and emotional past of interchanged ideas between these two, which must fatally shape the future of the one who was left bereaved of all support except for the unique legacy of that name. The young man had turned up; they had come face to face and, fortunately, without the direct interference of Madame de S——. What will come of it ?

Of course it was open to her to say nothing more. She seemed to be weighing something in her mind. It occurred to me, not for the first time, that it was not intellect which was the stamp of that admirably poised head, but courage, the most fascinating virtue in a woman. It was only natural that, as I took my eyes off her, my thought should turn to the young man, the bearer of the only name uttered in all the dream-talk of a future to be brought about by a revolution. And my thought took the shape of asking myself why this young man had not called upon these ladies. He had been in Geneva for some days before Miss Haldin heard of him first in my presence from Peter Ivanovitch. I regretted that last's presence at their meeting. I would rather have had it happen somewhere out of his spectacled sight. But I supposed that, having both these young people there, he introduced them to each other.

I broke the silence by beginning a question on that point.

"I suppose Peter Ivanovitch. . ."

Miss Haldin gave vent to her indignation. Peter Ivanovitch, directly he had got his answer from her, had turned upon the *dame de compagnie* in a shameful manner.

"Turned upon her?" I wondered. "What about? For what reason?"

"It was unheard of; it was shameful," Miss Haldin pursued, with angry eyes. "*Il lui a fait une scène*—like this before strangers. And for what? You would never guess. For some eggs. . . . Oh!"

I was astonished. "Eggs, did you say?"

"For Madame de S——. That lady observes a special diet or something of the sort. It seems she had complained the day before to Peter Ivanovitch that the eggs were not rightly prepared. Peter Ivanovitch suddenly remembered this against the poor woman and flew out at her. It was most astonishing. I stood as if rooted."

"Do you mean to say that the great feminist allowed himself to be abusive to a woman?" I asked.

"Oh, not that. It was something you have no conception of. It was an odious performance. Imagine, he raised his hat, to begin with. He made his voice soft and deprecatory. 'Ah, you are not kind to us—you will not deign to remember. . . .' This sort of phrases, that sort of tone. The poor creature was terribly upset. Her eyes ran full of tears. She did not know where to look. I shouldn't wonder if she would have rather preferred abuse or even a blow."

I did not remark that very possibly she was familiar with both on occasions when no one was by. Miss Haldin walked by my side, her head up in scornful and angry silence.

"Great men have their surprising peculiarities," I observed, inanely. "Exactly like men who are not great. But that sort of thing cannot be kept up forever. How did the great feminist wind up this very characteristic episode?"

Miss Haldin, without turning her face my way, told me that the end was brought about by the appearance of the interviewer who had been closeted with Madame de S——.

He came up rapidly, unnoticed, lifted his hat slightly and paused to say in French, "The Baroness has asked me in case I met a lady on my way out to desire her to come in at once."

(To be Continued)